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BR 75-05

Feb 75

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The Comm. Alternative for Cambodia: The Royal Gov. of N. U.

BR 75-5

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*The Communist Alternative
for Cambodia: The Royal
Government of National Union*

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NATIONAL SECURITY INFORMATION
Unauthorized Disclosure Subject to Criminal Sanctions

Classified by 004050
Exempt from General Declassification Schedule
of E.O. 11652, exemption category:
§ 58(1), (2), and (3)
Automatically declassified on:
date impossible to determine

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PREFACE

On 5 May 1970, 2 months after his ouster as Cambodia's Chief of State and subsequent arrival in Peking, Prince Norodom Sihanouk announced the formation of the Royal Government of National Union (RGNU) and its affiliated political front organization, the National United Front of Cambodia (FUNK). He had first proposed their creation on 23 March, when he outlined his five-point program for regaining power in Cambodia. As Chief of State of the RGNU, Sihanouk, at the time of its formation, had considerable influence in the government. Currently, however, he has a much diminished role.

The RGNU's Role

The RGNU was established as a rival government to the Government of the Khmer Republic headed by President Lon Nol, and theoretically it would become the legal government should the Khmer Communists (KC) take control of Cambodia. The RGNU is a government in name only, however. It has no seat, and its members are widely dispersed. Since the almost wholesale transfer of portfolios to insurgents inside Cambodia in November 1973, RGNU Cabinet members have never been known to sit together for a Cabinet meeting. As currently constituted, the RGNU is little more than a front for the Khmer Communist Party (KCP). The political complexion of the RGNU has changed since its establishment. Originally, the RGNU Cabinet was composed mainly of men who were based in Peking with Sihanouk and were either loyal to him or convinced that he would eventually triumph. More than half of the original 12 portfolios were held by individuals considered non-Communist in orientation; the remainder were held by known Communists.

In the intervening 5 years, the Communists have assumed control of the overwhelming majority of the Cabinet posts. Those representatives of the RGNU and FUNK stationed outside Cambodia, either in quasi-diplomatic assignments or with Sihanouk in Peking, now serve primarily to provide a voice for the in-country elements of the RGNU, and more importantly for the KC, on the international scene.

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1973-74 Decrees

On 15 January 1975 the KC-controlled Khmer Information Agency published several decrees that Sihanouk had issued in November 1974. They formalized changes in the RGNU Cabinet that had taken place for the most part in November 1973.

A decision was made in 1973 to transfer most of the RGNU Cabinet portfolios held by men outside Cambodia—a number of whom were non-Communist in orientation—to KC officials inside the country. When the transfer occurred, however, some loose ends remained: The status of the Cabinet members who had apparently been replaced was unclear, and two positions, including the important Finance and Economy portfolio, were left vacant. The 1974 decrees officially relieved the former Ministers of their posts and named Koy Thuon Minister of Finance and Economy and Men San Minister of Military Equipment and Armament, positions they had in fact been filling for at least a month before the decrees were published. The only new appointment in the 1974 decrees was that of Ros Chet Thor as a Deputy Foreign Minister.

The Significance of the Change

The decrees of 1973-74 clearly show Sihanouk's loss of authority in the RGNU, which technically he still heads. The Cabinet is now in the hands of the Communists: Although many lower level RGNU officials outside Cambodia are not Communists, 14 of the 17 Cabinet posts are held by people inside Cambodia who, except for Justice Minister Prince Norodom Phurissara, are probably all Communists.

Two of the three Cabinet members still based in Peking, Prime Minister Penn Nouth and Foreign Minister Sarin Chhak, are not Communists. They have probably retained their posts primarily because such an arrangement still seems politically useful to the KC. Nouth, who is old and in poor health, is on the sidelines and has little influence over a government from which he is physically separated. Ostensibly because of Nouth's ill health and his consequent inability to join his fellow Cabinet members inside the country, Khieu Samphan, the RGNU Deputy Prime Minister, who is in Cambodia, was appointed Acting Prime Minister in November 1973. The other Cabinet member in Peking is Deputy Foreign Minister Van Piny. He is leftist, if not Communist, in his political orientation.

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RGNU Position vis-à-vis the KCP

The KCP is the driving force behind both the military and political opposition to the Lon Nol government, and an individual's real power in the insurgency is reflected by his position in the KCP rather than in the RGNU. In classical Communist fashion, many members of the RGNU Cabinet appear to hold correspondingly high positions in the KCP.

Many of the 13 Communists in the Cabinet are believed to be members of the KCP Central Committee. Khieu Samphan is apparently an important KCP officer, although his preeminence in the party has not been established. Three other Cabinet members—Koy Thuon, Sok Thuok and Chou Chet—are said to be the chiefs of three of the six KC military regions.



Sihanouk with KCP and RGNU leaders during 1973 visit to Cambodia.
L-R Hou Yuon, Sihanouk, Khieu Samphan, Hu Nim, unknown, Ieng Sary
Saloth Sar, unknown, and Koy Thuon

Political Orientation of the 14 In-Country Ministers

Except for Norodom Phurissara, all the RGNU Ministers now in Cambodia are probably Communists, although information on Men San's political orientation is not available. Most may be Communists

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of a nationalist bent who are concerned with running their own affairs rather than heeding directives from foreign Communists.

Not all of them may feel that way, however, and some may be responsive to the advice of North Vietnamese or Chinese mentors. A number of the RGNU Ministers have probably received training in North Vietnam and possibly also in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Moreover, the Vietnamese Communists were influential in the early stages of the insurgency in helping to establish an effective KC military and political apparatus.

In recent years the KC have shown increased independence from the Vietnamese and have strengthened their ties to the Chinese. North Vietnam is, however, the main channel for military supplies entering Cambodia, and the PRC seems to be the primary source of those supplies.

Common Bonds Among the Communist Ministers

The Communist members of the Cabinet share various common bonds or loyalties. About half of them are said to be close to Khieu Samphan. Twelve of them are probably in their forties; only Thiounn Thoeunn, who is in his fifties, is considerably older than the rest. Seven are known to have studied in France during the same period in the 1950's. Six were members of the now infamous "34 leftists" whom Sihanouk, in one of his confrontations with the left, singled out in 1963 and sarcastically challenged to form a government. A number of that group, apparently suspecting that political repression would soon follow, disappeared from Phnom Penh.

Another cohesive factor may be the ties that five of the Cabinet members are known to have had with Kompong Cham Province. Hou Yuon, Hu Nim and Tiv Ol were evidently born there. Khieu Samphan was born in Svay Rieng Province, but he later lived in Kompong Cham and went to school there, possibly with Yuon and Nim. Koy Thuon and Ol taught school in Kompong Cham. Of the remaining Ministers whose birthplace is known, Toch Phoeun is the only one who was not born in either Kompong Cham or Phnom Penh.

With the possible exception of Sok Thuok and Kong Sophal, whose dates of affiliation with the KC are unknown, none of the RGNU Ministers left Phnom Penh before 1963. They are therefore less likely to be susceptible to Hanoi's political influence than older members of the KC insurgency who went to North Vietnam after the 1954 Geneva Accords and remained there until after Sihanouk's ouster.

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**THE CABINET OF THE ROYAL GOVERNMENT
OF NATIONAL UNION**

Prime Minister	Penn Nouth
Deputy Prime Minister; Minister of National Defense	Khieu Samphan
Minister of Interior, Security, Cooperatives and Communal Reforms	Hou Yuon
Minister of Information and Propaganda	Hu Nim
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Sarin Chhak
Minister of Justice and Judicial Reforms	Norodom Phurissara
Minister of Public Health	Thiounn Thoeunn
Minister of Public Works, Tele- communications and Recon- struction	Toch Phocun
Minister of Religious and Social Affairs	Chou Chet
Minister of Popular Education and Youth	Khieu Thirith
Minister of National Economy and Finance	Koy Thuon
Minister of Military Equip- ment and Armament	Men San
Deputy Minister of Security	Sok Thuok
Deputy Minister of National Defense	Kong Sophal
Deputy Minister of Informa- tion and Propaganda	Tiv Ol
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ros Chet Thor
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs	Van Piny

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